Religious Fundamentalism in India and Beyond

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We live in turbulent times. Our epoch is characterized by startling advances on the one hand and conditions of extreme socioeconomic retrogression and distress on the other. Social development is severely uneven and yet deeply intertwined. This has created unexpected convulsions which are exploding across the planet.

Both a consequence and a cause of this turbulence is a resurgence of religion. Religious fundamentalism has appeared at the turn of the century as a prominent tendency, a habit of mind found within religious communities and paradigmatically embodied in certain representative individuals and movements.[1] It manifests itself as a strategy by which beleaguered believers attempt to preserve their distinctive group identity. Feeling this identity to be at risk in the contemporary era, the believers fortify it by selective retrieval of doctrines, beliefs, and practices from a sacred past. This selection is carefully done so that it is not only appealing to the audience but also readily acceptable. While selective retrieval claims only to be restoring the ancient ways, in fact fundamentalist movements pick and choose carefully among inherited doctrines and practices, as well as cloaking innovations in the garments of antiquity. These retrieved fundamentals are refined, modified, and sanctioned in a spirit of pragmatism: they are to serve as a bulwark against the encroachment of outsiders who threaten to draw the believers into a syncretistic religious or irreligious cultural milieu.

The problem of fundamentalism knows no borders, and it is a common enemy of humanity. For many, "fundamentalism conjures up images of mobs shouting 'death to America,' embassies in flames, assassins and hijackers threatening innocent lives, hands chopped off, and women oppressed."[2] The inquisitive observer must ask not only "how effective have fundamentalist movements been in influencing their own adherents," but also "how much impact have they exercised in the lives of non-fundamentalists."[3] In cases in which the state is fundamen-

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talist (Iran, Sudan) or has been influenced by fundamentalist sociopolitical agendas (Egypt, Israel), the fundamentalism of the enclave is encouraged or even empowered to spill over its natural boundaries and permeate the larger society. The impact in these instances is of a different order than in a society that successfully marginalizes fundamentalists within it, as does the scientific establishment in the United States or the political establishment in Japan.[4]

Among the many dreams of both the British masters who quit the Indian subcontinent in 1947, and Mahatma Gandhi and his followers who forced the colonial power out, none was perhaps dearer to their hearts than the desire for the foundation of secular democracies in South Asia that were free from the turmoil of caste and religious violence. But from the very dawn of independence, sectarian rivalries have undermined that aspiration. Partition was followed by the two-way exodus of Hindus and Muslims and the communal carnage that took the lives of thousands of innocent victims. Since then, most nations of South Asia have constantly been plagued by increasingly violent political turmoil due to a growing intolerance toward their minorities. Regional experts now fear that religious fundamentalism and militancy are not only destroying South Asia's ethnic diversity, but also are putting the region's political secularism in danger of collapse. Hindu extremists in India, Tamil militants in Sri Lanka, and Islamic fundamentalists in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh pose a threat to the region's secular fabric.

Indian experience with fundamentalism has been bloody and traumatic. Mahatma Gandhi, before he could fully savor the fresh air of independent India, fell victim to a Hindu fundamentalist's bullets. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was gunned down by her own Sikh bodyguard in the aftermath of the Sikh fundamentalist movement that swept through the vibrant state of Punjab in the early 1980s. And a female suicide bomber of the Tamil fundamentalist group from Sri Lanka blew up Indira's son Rajiv Gandhi, who had succeeded her as Prime Minister. The assassinations of the Mahatma, Indira, and Rajiv serve as stark reminders of what happens when contractual bonds holding together the complex social elements composing the body politic are broken and when political affiliations are weakened.[5] John Mearsheimer's thesis that the end of Cold War would lead Europe to factionalism, violent ethnic conflicts, and civil wars seems applicable beyond Europe.[6]

Until the mid-1980s, the impact of Hinduism on the political landscape of India, where more than 80 percent of the people are adherents of this faith, was

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moderated by the political parties in power to maintain a secular democracy. But since the late 1980s, there has been increasing popular support for Hindu nationalist parties among the people of India.[7] Tension and distrust between Hindus and Muslims have long been a normal facet of life in India. The 1992 destruction of a disputed Muslim shrine in Ayodhya (in the Northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh) and the subsequent anti-Muslim riots in Bombay are among the events that have heightened Hindu-Muslim tensions.[8]

Surging populations, environmental degradation, and ethnic conflict—all of which are deeply related—are sowing the seeds of discontent across the globe.[9] Is the level of discontent in the world on the increase? Do we live in an age when religiously inspired reformation is becoming more likely? Or is the disenchantment with existing conditions which these movements express normal and to be expected? Unfortunately there is no good way to measure the levels of discontent that prevailed in times past. Hence historical comparisons with today's occurrences become merely impressionistic.[10]

Selecting the elements of tradition and modernity, fundamentalists seek to remake the world in the service of a dual commitment to the unfolding eschatological drama (by returning all things in submission to the divine) and to self-preservation (by neutralizing the threatening "other"). Boundaries are set, the enemy identified, converts sought, and institutions created and sustained in pursuit of a comprehensive reconstruction of society.[11] It is time we turn our attention to this growing fundamentalism and evolve a common platform for building mechanisms, institutions, and movements to counteract this phenomenon.

Fundamentalists and Fundamentalism

The term "fundamentalist" was first used with reference to a group of US Protestant churches that arose in the 1920s.[12] For many liberal or mainline Christians, the term "fundamentalist" is pejorative. It is applied rather indiscriminately to all those who advocate a literalist Biblical position. Generally, fundamentalists are regarded by their opponents as static, retrospective, and extremist.[13] Three decades ago, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* described them as "a motley group of theologically conservative communities which emphasize total and even literal inspiration from the Holy Scriptures and their absolute authority in matters of faith and works."[14] The term eventually came to be used for all religious movements that seek to return to "fundamentals" and to any movement seeking political power for the purpose of governing according to religious values.[15]

In his book, *Defenders of God*, Bruce Lawrence defines "fundamentalism" as: "The affirmation of religious authority as holistic and absolute, admitting of neither criticism nor reduction; it is expressed through the collective demand that specific creedal and ethical dictates derived from the scriptures be publicly recognized and legally enforced."[16] Scott R. Appleby, Emmanuel Sivan, and Gabriel Almond list the following five ideological characteristics linked to fundamentalists and fundamentalism:

- Fundamentalists are concerned first with the erosion of religion and its proper role in society;
- Fundamentalists are selective of their tradition and what part of modernity they accept or choose to act against;
- They embrace some form of Manicheanism (dualism);
- Fundamentalists stress absolutism and inerrancy in their source of revelation; and
- They opt for some form of Millennialism or Messianism.[17]

In the present lexicon some religious movements with political implications are described as fundamentalist movements. Fundamentalists in various traditions teach that there was a perfect moment, and they endeavor to recover that moment. This often involves reacting to that which is seen as a threat to realizing the ideal, even if the ideal never actually existed. It should be emphasized that there is a very thin line between fundamentalism and religious orthodoxy. Both obstruct change and contribute to social stagnation. The fundamentalists go a step further by being radical and in some cases spreading terrorism and violence as part of their zeal to spread their religion.[18]

"Fundamentalist" connotes a certain kind of believer who wishes to form or defend a state or society based in some explicit way upon sacred history, customs, traditions, and moral obligations. Yet there are both moderate fundamentalists, who work within the law to achieve these ends, and radical fundamentalists, who adopt extralegal means and resort to violence.

From the perspective of a non-fundamentalist, fundamentalisms are often scandalous. They appear to stand in the way of individual self-determination, to violate basic human rights, and to impede material advancement, progress, and prosperity. But this is precisely the point of fundamentalisms: they and their gods are not to be judged according to human standards. In their view, one cannot evaluate social behavior along strictly humanistic lines; behavior is good if it conforms to God's will.[19]

In contemporary political discourse in India, a "fundamentalist" is a person who resorts to selective retrieval, picking out from his religious tradition certain elements of high symbolic significance with a view to mobilizing his co-religionists for action. The goals of such action are usually a mixture of religious objectives and the politico-economic interests of one's own community as against those of similarly defined other communities.[20]

In the near contemporary religious history of South Asia, with its diverse religious and ethnic divisions, fundamentalist movements that have affected the events in the subcontinent are primarily the fundamentalist Jamaati-Islami, Hindu Nationalism, and Sikh Fundamentalism. Although the Sikh Fundamentalist Movement led to tragic events in the 1980s and 1990s, its impact has largely been contained, as its contours of influence were limited to the state of Punjab alone.[21] However, the rise in popularity of the other two religious movements and their ad-

verse effect on the internal stability of the subcontinent warrant detailed study to clearly assess the threat they pose.

Mawlana Mawdudi and the Rise of Jamaati-Islami

Mawlana Mawdudi was born in 1903 to a very religious family in Aurangabad, in Central India. His father, an austere and devout Muslim, educated his children at home in order to protect them from the social customs of the West that were invading Indian society. He was 16 when Gandhi started his nationalist movement for home rule. He cooperated with the Hindus for independence for some time, but eventually separated himself from the cause. He devoted his time to studying the Koran and to developing his ideas on an Islamic society apart from India. His writings indicated how to stem the flood of Western influences, claiming the superiority of Islam over non-Islamic ideas.

In the mid-1930s, when the Muslim League of India started to propagate its idea that the Muslims of India constitute a separate and distinct nation, Mawdudi was incensed. He feared that Muslims would stray from Islam toward nationalism. Nationalism, in his view, was a Western idea that rested on non-Islamic concepts.[22] In 1941, he created his own fundamentalist group, the Jamaati-Islami (the Islamic association). In his view, the best way to transform society was to create a small group of dedicated followers in order to capture political leadership. He cited the Fascists in Italy and the Nazis in Germany as examples. His intention was to restructure the whole of Indian society on an Islamic pattern.[23]

After partition of the subcontinent in 1947, Mawdudi went over to Pakistan like scores of other Indian Muslims. There he sent preachers to the villages of the new state. Very soon the number of his supporters swelled and the Jamaati-Islami (JI) emerged as a genuine political party which continued to develop and strengthen. But JI's attacks on the military dictatorship of General Ayub Khan, who took power in Pakistan in 1958, prompted its dissolution and the imprisonment of its leaders, including Mawdudi.

On his release in 1962, Mawdudi resumed his activities. Despite the fact that his association had lost its political clout, his ideas gained wide publicity in fundamentalist circles both in Pakistan and in the Muslim world at large. His concept of an Islamic state was used in 1978 by General Zia-Ul-Haq to justify his coup against the elected government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The General declared that he was a soldier of Islam dedicated to creating an Islamic state in Pakistan based on Mawdudi's ideas. Although the founder of JI was not there to give his opinion (Mawdudi had died in 1972), his supporters denounced Zia's usurpation. Despite the fact that the JI lost its importance as a fundamentalist group in Pakistan, the writings of Mawdudi, especially his concepts of an Islamic state, had started to penetrate every corner of the Muslim world.[24]

One of the most important contributions of Mawdudi in 20th-century Islam has been his presentation of Islam as a system of life, a complete code of

conduct that governs all aspects of human existence. The basic proposition in Mawdudi's theory is God's exclusive sovereignty. According to him,

> God's sovereignty covers all aspects of political and legal sovereignty also, and in these too no one other than God has any share. No monarch, no royal family, no elite class, no leader of any religious group, no democracy vested in the sovereignty of the people can participate in God's sovereignty. Whosoever claims such a position is a rebel. Similarly, any institution or individual attempting to assume political and legal sovereignty and seeking thereby to restrict the jurisdiction of God to spheres of personal law or religious duties is a usurper and a rebel. The truth is that no one can claim to be a lawgiver, save under the dispensation of God. No one can challenge the supreme authority of God Almighty in any sphere.[25]

Mawdudi's concepts of an Islamic state reject any Western model. In his view, everything about Western civilization is wrong and harmful because it is not God-given but elaborated by political leaders on the basis of false beliefs. To him and his followers, the West long ago denied the sovereignty of God. Therefore all things its people have constructed are unacceptable.

The works of Mawdudi were translated into Arabic and other languages as early as 1940. They exerted a profound influence on the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and in other Muslim countries. They helped shape contemporary military fundamentalist movements.[26]

Mawlana Mawdudi, although not a classical Muslim cleric and scholar, played a key role in the spread of militant Islamic fundamentalism. As early as 1926, when he was a journalist in India, he wrote, "Islam [is] a revolutionary ideology aimed at destroying the social order of the world, totally rebuilding it from scratch."[27] At the same time, he wrote that "*Jihad* [is] a revolutionary struggle and . . . the pristine struggle between good and evil [has] evolved into a conflict between Islam and non-Islam."[28] Mawdudi's ideas epitomize the views of today's militant Islamic fundamentalists who believe that contemporary Muslim societies have returned to *Jahilya* (a state of ignorance and unbelief that preceded the revelation of Islam).[29]

Diverse Paths of Jamaati-Islami

The Jamaat views Islam as a comprehensive way of life that covers the entire spectrum of human activity (individual, social, economic, or political). For the JI, Islam means the total commitment and subordination of all aspects of human life to the will of God. The JI has traced different paths in different regions of South Asia. At the level of ideas and political strategy, the South Asian Islamic scene offers an interesting example of how a religio-political movement tends to articulate its ideology in different political contexts. When the Jamaati-Islami became formally organized into two separate entities at the time of partition, the Pakistan Jamaat launched a campaign for the establishment of an Islamic state as the most important means for creating the order envisaged by Islam, while the In-

dian Jamaat deleted all references to the goal of establishing an Islamic state from its program of action.[30]

According to the Jamaat of India, there is nothing wrong with the formulation of secularism that states, "Secularism as a state policy implies that there should be no discrimination or partiality on the basis of religious belief."[31] In fact, the Jamaat has categorically affirmed that in the present circumstances it wants the secular form of government to continue. The Jamaat seems to believe that "the state must remain secular, but the Muslims should be saved from secularism."[32]

The Jamaat of erstwhile East Pakistan (present-day Bangladesh) followed a different path. During the 1971 civil war, the Jamaat was the only political party in East Pakistan that openly collaborated with the central government. With arms and weapons supplied by the Pakistan army, the Jamaat organized the Al-Badr Paramilitary Student Wing and fought pitched battles against the secessionist *Mukhti Bahini* (freedom-fighter) guerrillas.[33]

The Jamaat of Kashmir follows a different path altogether. Though it lacks the political clout to influence the people or polity of the troubled state, it raises its voice for separation from India and covertly supports and coordinates militant activities in the Kashmir Valley.

Islamic Fundamentalism

Several forms of fundamentalism promote revivalist movements of various religions, but internationally, Islamic fundamentalism is the most pronounced and widespread.[34] The entire Muslim world turned fundamentalist around the 12th century, when the ultraconservative interpretations of the Koran triumphed. Since that time, whenever Islamic ways of life have "softened," ultra-fundamentalists have reacted against the laxity of leaders who failed to implement the *Shariah*, the revealed laws of the religion of Islam.[35]

In the Indian subcontinent fundamentalism has surfaced in the chronic national and ethnic conflicts which have marred this ancient land. The rise of fundamentalist forces in other countries certainly helped revivalists in India gain popular sanction in the 1980s. Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan and the Middle East made a definite impression on Indian Muslim leaders, and this in turn further strengthened the morale of religious revivalists.[36]

Fundamentalisms seem closely aligned with nationalism and popular reaction against what are felt to be foreign cultural and religious traditions. This is especially clear among the Muslims. According to Dilip Hiro, "It is in the nature of any major religion to revitalize itself periodically. But Islam is special, because it is more than a religion."[37] More than anything else, reaffirmation of Islam, whatever its specific sectarian form, means the repudiation of European and American influence upon local society, politics, and morals.

For many centuries Muslims have lived with a sense that their world is superior to the non-Muslim world. They believe that Islam is the "last" religion, the final message sent by God to humans. In the 19th century, when Muslims be-

gan to discover that the West had advanced ahead of them in technology and in military power, a feeling of humiliation stirred in them. They had lost their dominant place in the world to the more advanced Christians. The feeling of humiliation reached its peak when tiny Israel defeated the Arabs in the 1967 war.[38] Nationalism, which had soothed Muslims for some decades, lost its attraction.

At that point, militant fundamentalism came into the picture. Only God could help Muslims in their adversity. For that to happen, they had to return to the strict implementation of divine law. Militant fundamentalism helped Muslims restore their sense of superiority. Fundamentalism has given Muslims confidence in their future. Slogans such as "Islam is the solution," "Everything is in the Koran," "Islam is superior to other religions," and "Let's start a new *Jihad*," and so on, have renewed the pride of Muslims.[39] If we speak of fundamentalism as a return to the foundations of Islam, the Koran, and the example of the Prophet in order to renew the community, then these movements are neo-fundamentalist or neo-revivalist, for they look to the sources of Islam not simply to replicate the past but to respond to a new age.[40]

Modern Islamic organizations have been the driving force behind the dynamic spread of the Islamic resurgence.[41] The Iranian revolution of 1978-79 focused attention on Islamic fundamentalism and with it the spread and vitality of political Islam in other parts of the Muslim world.[42] Mawlana Mawdudi noted, "Be it in the sphere of economics or politics, or civics or legal rights and duties, those who accept the principles of Islam are not divided by any distinction or nationality of class or country."[43]

Islam divides the human family into two factions: the believers and the infidels. It divides human history into two periods: the age of ignorance (*jahilya*) and the age of enlightenment. And it divides the inhabited earth into two camps: the land of the believers (*Dar-ul-Islam*) and the lands of the infidels (*Dar-ul-Harb*). Further, it postulates a permanent war between these divisions. The believers are called upon to wage an unceasing war (*Jihad*) on the infidels until the latter are converted or killed off. The age of enlightenment should strive in the same way, until everything belonging to the age of ignorance is remolded or replaced.[44] And the *Dar-ul-Islam* should continue to send faithful followers of Islam to the *Dar-ul-Harb* until it is converted into *Dar-ul-Islam*. This is the behavior pattern of Islamic fundamentalists. They cannot but look upon their non-Muslim neighbors as subjects to be converted by all means.

In his "Clash of Civilizations," written almost a decade ago, Samuel Huntington talks about Muslims involved with all other religions in most parts of the world when he says,

In Eurasia the great historical fault lines between civilizations are once more aflame. This is particularly true along the boundaries of the crescent-shaped Islamic bloc of nations from the bulge of Africa to Central Asia. Violence also occurs between Muslims, on the one hand, and Orthodox Serbs in the Balkans, Jews in Is-

rael, Hindus in India, Buddhists in Burma, and Catholics in the Philippines. Islam has bloody borders.[45]

In *The Broken Crescent*, Fereydoun Hoveyda makes a clear distinction between militant Islamic fundamentalism and mainstream Islam (or Islams). He believes there is not one single Islam, but different ways of expressing and practicing it.[46]

Muslim fundamentalism in India shares some of the abiding concerns of Islamic fundamentalism elsewhere in the world but also has some distinct local aspects.[47] Besides the economic and social problems which Muslims share with non-Muslims in India, there are issues that specifically affect Muslims as a group. Muslims are convinced that there is a pattern of discrimination against them.[48] They believe that they are considerably worse off than many other Muslim communities in non-Muslim countries and that their situation is deteriorating as a result of Hindu activism.[49]

Hindu Nationalism

Islam has always been considered a threat to the complacency of Hinduism. It threatens Hindus spiritually, socially, and ultimately politically, as well as in terms of classical Hindu values of tolerance, freedom of expression, and individualism. North Indian Hindus have been on the defensive since the end of the 19th century. The decennial census introduced by the British made the different communities aware of their own numerical strength, and showed the Hindus as losing ground in terms of population. Without drastic action, it appeared, the decline could be irreversible. Christianity, Islam, and Sikhism were all proselytizing religions, with active mechanisms for conversion; Hinduism was not. As things stood, the traffic in conversion was flowing only one way, and those lost to Hinduism were gone forever.[50]

Hindu Nationalists strongly feel that three elements are most essential for the progress of the Hindu *Jati* (in this sense, community, although usually the term connotes caste): that its members share a common language, that religion is held in common by them, and that members are in unity and share a common origin. "Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan," thus became a slogan coined to awaken Nationalist feelings.[51]

The evolution and resurgence of Hindu Nationalism at the state level is not very old. Although the Hindus were the majority community ruled by minority rulers since the 12th century A.D., there was no major uprising in any part of the subcontinent against any of the foreign rulers. Despite forceful conversions to Islam and other deprivations imposed on the Hindus during the reign of Mughals in general and Aurangazeb in particular, the only forces that rose or stood up against these harsh treatments were a handful like Shivaji, the Maratha warlord, and the Sikhs. Even the 1857 uprising against the British was more a military rebellion than one that was either a national or religious movement against the rulers.[52]

Later, with the growth of the Indian National Congress (nurtured by the British themselves), aspirations for self-rule and independence were channeled along a nonviolent path. With the ascension of Gandhi, the manner in which the political goals were to be realized was clearly defined and meticulously followed. It was only after the Muslim League came into the political arena and advocated a separate homeland for the Muslims that the Hindus were awakened and rose up against this idea.

The events that led to partition of the subcontinent as a consequence of independence, the Hindu-Muslim riots and trans-border movement that followed, and the assassination of Gandhi by a Hindu fundamentalist were the catalysts that really molded Hindu Nationalism into concrete shape. The belief that Gandhi was inclined more toward the minority Muslims was something not very palatable to the Hindu Nationalists' psyche. To them, being the majority community meant automatic elevation to the prime position, especially after having been under subjugation by foreign rulers for centuries without any respite.[53]

Although Hindu Nationalist organizations were active in some parts of India since independence, their growth and rising popularity has been closely linked to the rise and increased activities of Islamic fundamentalists and vice versa. While occasional Hindu-Muslim riots did occur at a few places at irregular intervals, these were a result of localized frictions and often perpetrated by narrow-minded individuals out to gain some petty dividends. What gave direction and purpose to this movement was a chain of events linked to the liberation of Bangladesh.

The first among these was the influx of Muslim refugees from this newly formed state beginning in 1971. This led to changes in the demography of some eastern states of the nation, especially in the state of Assam. The majority community suddenly became the minority, and this changed status made them feel threatened.[54]

The next event that fueled the Hindu Nationalist movement is not linked to Islam directly but is worth mentioning. This was the traumatic experience of the Hindus during the brief period of the Sikh extremist movement in Punjab. Between 1980 and 1984, when the movement was contained, it was mostly Hindus who bore the brunt of Sikh militancy in the state. The trust and brotherhood that had existed between the Hindus and Sikhs and which was the fabric of Punjabi rural life was suddenly shattered. Even after the situation was contained and normalcy returned, the Hindus remained shell-shocked by their traumatic experience.[55]

The ethnic cleansing of Hindus in Kashmir and the violence perpetrated

Coinciding with the turn of events in Kashmir, especially the proliferation of *Madrassas* in that state, there has been a discernible increase in the number of these Islamic religious schools in many parts of North India. The pretext to open these institutions was the plea that Urdu, the language of the Muslims, was not being taught in normal schools. But instead of knowledge to enlarge the mind with logic and analytical reasoning, what is being imparted to the pupils is religious indoctrination and narrow fundamentalist philosophy.[56] Along with the mushrooming of *Madrassas,* there has been a discernible demographic change. The Muslim population that had stood at less than 10 percent at the time of independence has enlarged to over 14 percent and is continuing to grow.

Today there is a new Hindu identity under construction in many parts of India, especially in the northern and central states. It is a process which is undoubtedly propelled by the fact that this identity is also the basis of the political growth of some contemporary parties.[57] Political scientist Gabriel Almond has stated, "It is not unusual for ethnicity and religion to combine, as in Hinduism. Hindu Fundamentalism is ethno-nationalist as well as religious. The two spheres are not neatly separated."[58]

The rise of Hindu Nationalism in a country with a very significant number of minorities (the numbers are even larger than the whole population of some large countries around the world) means that India, for a very long time to come, will be embroiled in recurring crises like the many it faces now. This could impede the positive growth and development of its reviving but still shaky economy. Fanaticism and the chaos it could bring within India are not healthy for the growth and prosperity of the nation.

Finding Solutions

There is no great ferment taking place in the world of religious ideas, beliefs, and rituals, or any marked increase in the sum of human spirituality.[61] What we are witnessing today is less the resurgence of religion than of communalism, where a community of believers has not only a religious affiliation but also social, economic, and political interests in common. These may conflict with the corresponding interests of another community of believers sharing the same geographical space.

The basic reason for supposing that religiously inspired reform movements may be gaining momentum in our time is that perceptions of inequity in human affairs and the tangible realities that provoke those perceptions are on the increase. Population growth on the one hand, and advanced means of communications on the other, more often than not disrupt accustomed ways of life. They help to create personal uncertainty, isolation, and disappointment. The resulting distress can and often does find expression in fundamentalist movements that attempt to counteract uncertainty, isolation, and disappointment by forming supportive communities of fellow believers. It is no accident that these movements are based in countries where the continuation of old village ways is becoming impossible for a majority of the population, where urban-based mass communications, by penetrating the villages, have begun to erode an age-old framework of peasant life.[62]

The problem in India is that the nation continues to keep religion and the state intertwined. In a country that has many religions, the government and the people must realize that religion and the state have to be separate. Mixing the two has never worked, and it never will. The stability of the state system depends critically on the state's role in balancing and mediating relationships between thousands of separate communities. Such balancing requires careful and measured degrees of impartiality, neutrality, syncretism, and tolerance.[63] What has bound communities to each other has been the manufactured mechanisms and symbols of the secular state. These structures, while supportive of local religious and sectarian institutions, had to remain impartial, neutral, or secular.

Future conflicts will be those of communal survival, aggravated, or in many cases caused by, environmental scarcity. These conflicts will be subnational, meaning that it will be hard for states and local governments to protect their own citizens physically. This is how many states may ultimately die.[64] As state power fades, peoples and cultures around the world will be thrown back upon their own strengths and weaknesses, with fewer equalizing mechanisms to protect them. The coming decades will see us more aware of our differences than our similarities. To the average person, political values will mean less and personal security more.

The story of Hindu-Muslim relations takes on different hues depending upon the color of one's ideological lenses. To the conservative Hindu Nationalists for whom the Hindu saffron and the Muslim green do not mix, the rift between the two communities is a fundamental fact of Indian history. To them, it is a thousand-year-old "civilizational" conflict in which Muslims, militarily victori-

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ous and politically ascendant for centuries, have tried to impose Islamic civilization on their Hindu subjects through all means, and yet had only limited success.[65]

How non-Muslims think of Islam conditions the manner in which they deal with Muslims, which in turn conditions how Muslims think of and deal with non-Muslims.[66] There is the opposite in everything between Hindus and Muslims. The Hindu faces the east to the rising sun to pray; the Muslim to the setting sun, toward Mecca, in the west. The Hindu writes from left to right; the Muslim from right to left. The Hindu eats with the right hand; the Muslim with the left. The Hindu worships the cow; the Muslim attains paradise by eating beef. The Hindu man keeps a mustache; the Muslim man always shaves his upper lip. Whatever one does, it is the other's religion to do the opposite.[67]

Violence is present in all religions, and has been seen as necessary for the realization of religious goals. Religious violence has taken many forms, some as extreme as the practice of animal or human sacrifice, the righteous and often excruciatingly cruel punishment envisaged for sinners, the exorcism of spirits and demons, the killing of witches or apostates, and in ascetic violence against the self. More broadly, every religion has a vision of divinely legitimized violence under certain circumstances: the holy war of the Christians, the just war of the Jews, and the jihad of the Muslims.[68]

As India's religious traditions developed, images of warfare persisted. The great epics (the Mahabharata and the Ramayana) contain grand accounts of wars and battles, and the enduring sermon of Lord Krishna, the Bhagawad Gita, was recorded in the Mahabharata as being delivered on the battlefield.

The Gita gave several reasons why killing in warfare is permissible, among them the argument that the soul can never be killed: "He who slays, slays not; he who is slain is not slain."[69] Another reason is based in *Dharma* (moral obligation): the duties of a member of the *Kshatriya* (warrior) caste by definition involve killing, so violence has been justified in the very maintenance of social order.[70]

Islam is ambiguous about violence. Like all religions, Islam occasionally allows for force, while stressing that the main spiritual goal is one of nonvio-

Islam began as a revolution against ignorance; yet today, 1,400 years from its founding, the freshness of the youngest world faith is debilitated by ignorance. The fault lies not with the disenfranchised Muslim masses, but with dishonest leaders whose interests are served and strengthened by keeping the people as ill-informed as possible. Mass illiteracy guarantees that Islam will be used more to impede progress and less to aid it.[73] The challenge Muslims face, therefore, is to realize the Holy Prophet's revolutionary message by identifying Islam as an ally of progress instead of its foe. In that realization could be the beginnings of a true Islamic renaissance.

In India, what Muslims need is the preservation and strengthening of their religio-cultural identity. The only solution to the problem faced by the Indian Muslims is to look inward to their own weaknesses, rectify the moral lapses in their personal behavior and realize their potential as bearers of the universal message of Islam. They should raise themselves above the petty concerns of material injustices and should not entertain any bitterness, envy, or anger against the majority community. At the same time, the majority community must always provide constitutional guarantees that the minority's rights will be respected, not trampled. Let Hindus in India choose their way of life freely. But if they attempt to impose it upon any other groups, then they are clearly in the wrong. Liberty entails a responsibility to justice. Let no one's freedom become someone else's torment.

Conclusion

In the Indian democratic, secular system, there is only one real criterion that needs to be used to evaluate any type of movement. Does it infringe on the rights and liberties of other people within the democratic society? If it does, then it has transgressed beyond what a democracy should allow. By opting for democracy, we have accepted the fact that the people have a right to choose their way of life. But this freedom of action should not lend itself to creation of opposing fundamentalist movements and the likely conflicts between these movements. How can we prevent such communal confrontations? The answer lies in finding ways to evolve better communal relations.

Despite conquests, domination, and various outside influences for centuries, India managed to retain her distinct identity during the pre-independence era and after electing to be a secular, democratic republic in 1947. It has remained on course toward progress and prosperity in spite of numerous challenges to her unity and sovereignty. The threat posed to stability in the region by religious fundamentalism is yet another challenge to be faced. It is a tragedy that our religious and cultural identities have assumed such violent forms. We must recognize that the causes for the rise of religious fundamentalism within the subcontinent are essentially internal. Our societies are far larger, more complex, and more diverse than the small homogeneous tribal society that existed at the advent of Christ or the Prophet Muhammad.

Our collective survival lies in recognizing that religion is not the solution. We have but one choice, the path of secular humanism, based on the principles of logic and reason. Our founding fathers gave us a nation founded on the principle that power belongs to the people and set us on the path of a secular democratic state that respects religious freedom and human dignity. This alone can offer us the hope of providing every citizen with the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of excellence.

Peace (*Shanti* in the Indian scriptures) is fundamental to the Hindu way and view of life. In Islam, beneficence and mercy (*Rahman* and *Rahim* in the Koran) are the main attributes of God. With such profound similarities in mind, all Indians—Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, and nonbelievers—must reexamine their past, which can give them valuable clues on how to realize a more peaceful and cooperative future.

NOTES

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32. Ibid., pp. 505-06.

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